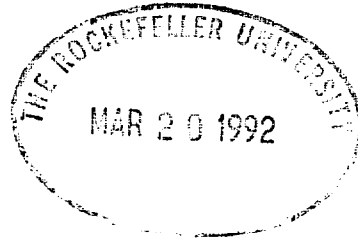


Abigail L. Albert
2985 Grandin Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45208

(X) ✓ 3/30/92
mg

oL

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Suite 400
The Rockefeller University
1230 York Avenue
New York, New York 10021-6399



Dear Joshua,

No, that cultured voice at the other end of the phone did not bring back memories. But the name Joshua Lederberg did! Of course your name surfaces from time to time, always accompanied by a tale of Herculean mental muscle, and you are remembered by both Roy and me. I imagine you look much the same as you did in the fourth grade- a little less hair perhaps? As for me, I am still small for my age and I still have a lavish supply of freckles, but, hey, Time isn't the greatest make-up artist. I rely on being cheerful.

Your essay was poignant and evocative, I'm looking forward to seeing you here and looking backward with you. Roy remembers his Columbia days fondly, as I hope you do.

As I think back through the decades, almost half a century of married life, a quarter of a century of teaching (most of it in the bleak South Bronx) four children and half a dozen grandchildren -all begins to recede and I am back in the fifth grade of P.S. 46. Behind me are huge oak sliding doors and a class of giggling ten year olds and.....

my classmates in
1st grade

.....Standing before me is a slightly paunchy boy in knickers, his unpressed and somewhat dingy shirt embellished with a stringy tie. He looks somewhat middle-aged, certainly not boyish, as he recounts his adventures on a trip to Israel. He seems oblivious of his tittering audience as he tells us, "We went op and op the stairs and op and op and op..." This is Joshua, our class genius. His hand was always waving, long before the teacher finished asking the question. But Joshua was not merely going to answer the question. Ah, no. He was going to ask a question, one which the teacher couldn't answer. So she tried not to see the insistent hand. Those were the days when our charming Irish teachers were supposed to be omniscient. Poor Miss Sheehan, Miss Curran, Miss Ostrander and the rest. What to do with Joshua?

There was the day the teacher announced the results of the I.Q. test. No one had less than 100. Well, as bright children they were used to good grades. But this was intoxicating! Wait 'til Mom hears this! And the teacher, (was it Miss Kline? Or Mrs. Urdang?) says, "And we're all very proud of Joshua, who had the highest I.Q. in the district!" And Joshua's raised hand is at last acknowledged. He stands up. "Netchurally," he shrugs.

I don't think we learned very much in that school, but we didn't know there were schools where the bathrooms did not consist of troughs with wooden covers and holes too small to accommodate children who wouldn't sit on the filthy things and whose aim was none too good. We didn't know there were schools where you didn't have to spend hours doing the Palmer Method and what seemed like hours sitting on our hands or with our hands on our heads or folded in our laps.

If you were like me you raised your hand too much and fidgetted too much and so you got to be a messenger going back and forth between teachers with notes about Mr. Polonsky (the only male teacher) and other giggle fuel.

We knew we were smart because everyone said so and because we always go 'A's in the 'l' class. We were neat and clean and polite and knew our 'times' table and our spelling words and were amply rewarded for these meagre accomplishments. P.S. 46 did not encourage thinking. "Little Man" Lederberg was a recognized genius and P.S. 46 did not know what to do with him!

*Nostalgically yours,
Ally Albert*